

Questions & Answers about child care

Today, parents work inside and outside of the home. Their child care needs depend on their lifestyles and schedules. Work or school requires many parents to be away from their children for at least part of the day. For peace of mind, they want their children to have child care that is safe, fun, and loving, where they can learn. It takes time and thought to find a good child care provider who is close by, trustworthy, affordable and reliable.

1. I need to find someone to care for my child while I work. What are my choices?

The most common types of child care are:

- **In-home care** by a caregiver who comes to your home
- **Family child care** provided by a caregiver in his or her home, usually caring for a small group of children
- **Child care centers** which care for larger groups of children divided by age groups
- **Pre-kindergarten child care** provided by public schools, including Head Start programs

Children can learn and grow in many places. The right day care for your child depends on his or her needs. Decide which is best

for your family.

2. How do I arrange for child care?

- 1) Gather information. Ask friends and coworkers who they know or use. Contact local child care agencies for information. If your child has special needs, they can help you find what you need. Check to see if your community has a Head Start program or public pre-kindergarten program.
- 2) Search for the right place by phone. Call and ask about availability, hours and location, costs, and quality of program. Check to see if they have licenses.
- 3) Visit the caregivers and programs that seem best for you. Be

wary of child care programs that won't allow you to drop in unannounced. *It is a good idea to drop in unannounced occasionally once your child is in child care.* When you visit, ask questions, get to know the caregivers and watch how they work with children. Ask for information about group size, child-adult ratio, space, and safety. Each state has staff ratio limits for child care providers. For information on your state, check the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care (800-598-KIDS or <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/>).

Staff-to-child ratios are different for each age. The National Network for Child Care indicates the following ratios work best for children:

Child's age	The Most children for each staff	The Most children for
Infants		
0-9 months old	4	8
Toddlers		
10-23 months old	6	12
2-year-olds	8	16
3-year-olds	12	24
4- and 5-year-olds	15	30
6 years and older	20	40

When you make announced and unannounced visits, ask

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yourself:

- Do the children look happy, active, and busy?
- Are the children playing well with other children and caregivers?
- Is the general atmosphere warm, friendly, and welcoming?
- Do the activities seem appropriate?
- Do caregivers seem patient and supportive?
- Are caregivers positive and consistent in their approach to discipline?
- Do *you* feel comfortable there?

4) Check references for caregivers and programs that meet your needs.

5) Before making a decision, let your child visit to see how he or she likes it.

3. How can I tell if an in-home provider is going to be a good match for my infant son?

After talking with the caregiver and checking references, you can invite him or her to spend some time in your home while you are there. Give the caregiver and your son time alone to get to know one another. Offer help, if needed, or answer questions. Listen and watch to see how they respond to one another. This will help you know if it could be a good match.

4. How can I help my 18-month-old daughter get used to the new child care center?

Before leaving your child at a new child care center, plan to visit ahead of time. As time comes for her to start, talk about the new place. Allow plenty of time the first morning so that you do not feel rushed. As you leave, let her know when you'll be back. For example, you may tell her you will return after her afternoon nap. Let her take a favorite toy or blanket that will help her feel safe and secure. She might also want to take a picture of you to comfort her while you are gone.

5. How can I tell if my child care is good?

Pay close attention to your child. It is a good sign if your child is happy and looks forward to going to child care. You can also talk with the staff. Work with them to solve any problems that come up. If your child is unhappy and doesn't like going, even after a normal adjustment period, look for other child care.

6. How can I go back to work and still be a good parent?

You may have to work to support your family. Balancing home and work responsibilities is not easy. The only time you and your child have together may be when both of you are tired. Doing things together may require more effort. You may worry about getting things done, like laundry, cooking, and grocery shopping. Try cooking simpler meals and wearing clothes that do not need ironing.

This can help you find more quality time with your child. Having your child help you complete some of the simpler chores, such as picking the newspapers up off of the floor, may be another way of both getting the chores done and spending time together.

7. My 3-year-old son is starting a pre-kindergarten program at our local elementary school. How can I make sure he doesn't pick up bad behaviors from other children?

The way that you have raised your son, the role modeling you have provided, and the things that you have taught your son will be the primary influences in his life. From this point forward, he will be around a variety of children in different settings and will have many choices. As he watches how other children behave, talk about what happens when he or other children misbehave.

Beginning a new preschool will be a good chance for him to learn how to use the skills you have given him. This is an important step in his becoming independent. Starting a new program is also a good chance for your son to learn from his mistakes, as well as an opportunity for him to have successes. Using these skills is one of the first steps in learning responsibility.

Your son needs the freedom to have experiences outside of your family. He also still needs your guidance and support.

Talk with him about his friends and the other children at his school. Talk about his likes and dislikes. Make it clear that he can come to you and talk about anything. Stay in close contact with his teacher so that you know how he is doing at school and his teacher knows how he is doing away from school.

Make your rules at home clear and use them consistently. You can remind your son that while another child may misbehave at preschool, it is not acceptable in your home. Remind him of the family rules.

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